ATARI® PROGRAM EXCHANGE

Jose R. Suarez

BLOCK 'EM

APX-10090 APX-20090

User-Written Software for ATARI Home Computers

Jose R. Suarez

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by

Jose R. Suarez

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INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

BLOCK 'EM is an exciting, two-player action game. You and your opponent each maneuver a moving wall with your joysticks to be the first to force the other to collide. Every time your opponent collides with a wall or playing field boundary, his wall glows and disintegrates, and you score a point. BLOCK 'EM offers several options. You determine the winning score--anywhere from 1 to 99 points--for quick or prolonged games. You also choose whether to build small-block or large-block mazes. You can usually play longer, more intricate rounds with small-block mazes, but young or novice players might prefer the larger block size at first. You can also select from six play speeds. Besides snail, slow, fast, and full-tilt speeds, BLOCK 'EM offers a progressive or a rapid acceleration from slowest to fastest pace as a round progresses. BLOCK 'EM calls for both reflex speed and strategy, but the relative importance of each depends on the options you select.

REQUIRED ACCESSORIES

Cassette version

16K RAM
ATARI 410 Program Recorder

Diskette version

24K RAM
ATARI 810 Disk Drive

ATARI BASIC Language Cartridge

A set of ATARI Joystick Controllers

CONTACTING THE AUTHOR

Users wishing to contact the author about BLOCK 'EM may write to him at:

2988 High Forest Lane, #134
Cincinnati, Ohio 45223

GETTING STARTED

LOADING BLOCK 'EM INTO COMPUTER MEMORY

1. Plug the set of joystick controllers into the first and second (the two leftmost) controller jacks at the front of your computer console.

2. Insert the ATARI BASIC Language Cartridge in the (Left Cartridge) slot of your computer.

3. <u>If you have the cassette version of BLOCK 'EM:</u>

   a. Turn on your TV set.

   b. Turn on your computer and connect your program recorder to the computer and to a wall outlet.

   c. Slide the BLOCK 'EM cassette into the program recorder's cassette holder and press REWIND on the recorder until the tape rewinds completely. Then press PLAY.

   d. Type CLOAD on your computer and then press the RETURN key two times. The tape will load into computer memory.

   e. After the tape finishes loading, the word READY will display on your TV screen. Type RUN and press the RETURN key. The first display screen will appear on your TV screen.

   <u>If you have the diskette version of BLOCK 'EM:</u>

   a. Turn on your disk drive.

   b. When the BUSY light goes out, open the disk drive door and insert the BLOCK 'EM diskette with the label in the lower right-hand corner nearest to you. Close the door.

   c. Turn on your computer and TV set.

   d. When the READY prompt displays on your TV screen, type RUN "D:BLOCKEM" and press the RETURN key. If you're using more than one disk drive, remember to follow the device initial (D) with the number of the drive containing the BLOCKEM diskette (e.g., RUN "D2:BLOCKEM" for disk drive two). The program will load into computer memory and start.

THE FIRST DISPLAY SCREEN

The first display screen contains the program title and the prompt for entering the game-winning score. It looks roughly as follows:

```
++++++++++++++++
+  BLOCK 'EM   +
++++++++++++++++


 MAXIMUM SCORE: 10
```

Figure 1 First Display Screen

You set all game options and play the game by moving your joystick controller and pressing the red trigger button. Player one uses the joystick in the first jack and is called the "Left Player". Player two uses the joystick in the second jack and is call the "Right Player". Hold the joysticks so that the red trigger button is at the upper left, toward the TV screen.

SELECTING GAME OPTIONS

Maximum Score

Set the winning score that will end the game by moving either joystick forward (toward the TV screen) to increase the number next to the MAXIMUM SCORE prompt or backward (toward yourself) to decrease this number. You may choose any number between 1 and 99. (The "Hints and Suggestions" section has more information about setting maximum scores.) When your desired number displays, press the red trigger button.

Block Size

After you press the red trigger button, the prompt to select wall-block size displays:

```
SELECT PLAYFIELD:

 => LARGE BLOCKS
    SMALL BLOCKS
```

You build your wall in BLOCK 'EM by connecting blocks. You move around by adding blocks to your wall. You can choose one of two block sizes. Large blocks make thick walls that fill the screen fairly quickly. Small blocks create thinner walls that fill the screen more slowly. One large block covers the same area as four small blocks. Therefore, you can usually play longer, more intricate rounds with small blocks.

Use either joystick to position the arrow next your preferred block size and then press the red trigger button to go on to the next prompt.

Play Speed

The final prompt asks you to select a playing speed from these choices:

```
SELECT PLAY SPEED:

=> SNAIL RALLY
   SLOW
   FAST
   FULL SPEED
   PROGRESSIVE
   ACCELERATING
```

This option determines the speed with which you can add blocks to your wall. SNAIL RALLY is the slowest, FULL SPEED the fastest. (Remember, though, that block size also affects speed.) PROGRESSIVE begins game play at the slowest speed and progresses through each speed until you're playing at FULL SPEED. ACCELERATING begins at the slowest speed and accelerates, slowly at first, and then more rapidly, until you're playing at FULL SPEED.

Use either joystick to move the arrow next to your preferred speed and then press the red trigger button.

The program will then display all your game options. For example, if you chose to play until one player scores 50 points, using small blocks and full speed, the option display would look like this:

```
PLAY TO: 50 POINTS
WITH: SMALL BLOCKS
SPEED: FULL

------------------------

=> START GAME
   SELECT OPTIONS
```

Figure 2 Option Display

If you change your mind about one or more of your settings, use either joystick to position the arrow next to SELECT OPTIONS and press the red trigger button. The program will then redisplay each option for you to choose a setting. When the game options are as you want them, position the arrow next to START GAME and press the red trigger button.

PLAYING BLOCK 'EM

After you press the red trigger button to start the game, the message "GET READY" flashes several times. Then the screen clears and the play screen appears.

MOVING YOUR WALL

A blue wall outlines the playing field. Player one controls a yellow wall, and player two controls a green wall. The walls automatically head toward each other. Use your joystick to maneuver your wall to avoid colliding with your opponent's wall. Your wall moves and expands upward when you push forward on your joystick, downward when you push backward, to the left when you push leftward, and to the right when you push rightward:

```
                      move wall up
                           ^
                           |
                           |
move wall left <---           ---> move wall right
                           |
                           |
                           v
                     move wall down
```

You can also push your joysticks diagonally to create zig-zag movement in any direction. That is,if your wall was most recently moving vertically, pushing your joystick diagonally causes it to move horizontally and vice versa. As long as you push diagonally, your wall will continue to alternate horizontal and vertical movement along the diagonal corresponding to the direction in which your pushing the joystick. Thus, you have a lot of directional control over your wall's movement.

You can't change the speed of motion, only the direction--you have no brakes! Don't try to get out of trouble by pushing your joystick against the direction of motion, that is, by turning into your wall. The wall changes direction through any joystick direction <u>except</u> a 180-degree turn. To reverse direction, you do two 90-degree turns (or some variation on this pattern). The program confirms changes in direction with a quick "bleep". Player one's bleep is lower-pitched than player two's bleep.

COLLISIONS

When one player's wall collides into the other's, the colliding wall(s) glow, the point(s) of collision blink several times, and the walls fade and disappear from the screen. Get set to start moving again once your new wall displays!

SCORING

After each collision, the player who didn't collide earns one point. If both players crash at the same time, no one earns a point for that round. The program updates your scores and briefly displays them after each round.

When one player is one point away from winning, the playfield boundaries glow red. When a player wins the game, he's rewarded with whistles and a softly flashing score. A tie game is impossible since a simultaneous collision results in no points awarded.

STOPPING A GAME TEMPORARILY

You can stop a session temporarily whenever the score displays by pressing the red trigger button on either joystick. The Option Display (see Figure 2) redisplays, with a CONTINUE option added to the START GAME and SELECT OPTION choices. This gives you the chance to review or reset your game options and to stop the game temporarily yet not forfeit all the action to this point (if, for example, the telephone rings). To resume the round, position the arrow next to CONTINUE and press the trigger button. The score will display briefly and the current game will then continue.

If you leave BLOCK 'EM unattended, it will stop automatically after six consecutive, simultaneous collisions, and you'll have to start over again. If you want to leave a game temporarily, but you want to avoid this problem, press and hold down the CTRL key and then press the 1 (one) key. Play will freeze, but sounds won't be turned off. Lower the volume on your TV set if the noise disturbs you. To resume play, readjust the TV volume and press CTRL-1 again.

STARTING A NEW GAME

To begin a new game press the red trigger button on ether joystick after ending a game or whenever the score display appears. The scores will reset to zero and the Option Display screen will appear. Press the red trigger button again with the arrow positioned next to START GAME to play another game using the same option settings. Or, position the arrow next to SELECT OPTIONS to change the settings before starting another game.

HINTS AND SUGGESTIONS

STRATEGY

The object of BLOCK 'EM is to trap your opponent so that he has nowhere to go. Try to box him in so that he'll run out of space quickly and collide with a wall (his own, yours, or the boundary). Naturally, he'll try to do the same to you!

Look for places where he could fence you in. Don't follow his wall to closely if he's ahead of you, because he could cut in front of you at any time. (Try doing this to him, though.) Practice making quick turns, and always keep an eye on the exits.

Reflex speed (that is, hand-eye coordination) and strategy are both important in BLOCK 'EM. Which factor is more important depends on your selected speed of play and block size. For example, in the large-block field at full speed, avoiding collisions will take most of your time; strategy is secondary. At the slowest speed, however, you have plenty of time to plan your moves.

CHOOSING A MAXIMUM SCORE

Although choosing a maximum score is largely a matter of personal choice, keep scores within reason. Playing to 99 points at the slowest speed using small blocks could take hours! A good rule of thumb is this: the slower the speed, the lower your maximum score should be. Below is a table of suggested maximum scores. If you find you prefer others, add them to the table for future reference.

Table 1 Suggested Maximum Scores

SPEED		BLOCK SIZE	
		Large	Small
S	Snail	8	3
P	Slow	10	5
E	Fast	15	8
E	Full Speed	21	10
D	Progressive	15	10
	Accelerating	15	10

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ATARI PROGRAM EXCHANGE

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1. Name and APX number of program ______________________________

2. If you have problems using the program, please describe them here.

____

____

____

3. What do you especially like about this program?

____

____

____

4. What do you think the program's weaknesses are?

____

____

____

5. How can the catalog description be more accurate and/or comprehensive?

____

____

6. On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being "poor" and 10 being "excellent", please rate the following aspects of this program?

_____ Easy to use
_____ User-oriented (e.g., menus, prompts, clear language)
_____ Enjoyable
_____ Self-instructive
_____ Useful (non-game software)
_____ Imaginative graphics and sound

7. Describe any technical errors you found in the user instructions (please give page numbers).

8. What did you especially like about the user instructions?

9. What revisions or additions would improve these instructions?

10. On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 representing "poor" and 10 representing "excellent", how would you rate the user instructions and why?

11. Other comments about the software or user instructions:

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